

Poverty In Schools

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Poverty has been an issue in society that affects all walks of life. Whether one is born into generational poverty, or thrown into situational poverty, livelihood under such conditions is limited (Beegle, 2007). A family of four in the United States is at the poverty threshold if they make less than \$24,036 each year (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). “The negative effects of poverty have a pervasive impact on the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. More than 45 million people in the United States hover around the poverty line, about 20% of whom are children. These children are at great risk for continuing the cycle of living in poverty” (Arnett-Hartwick, 2016). As evidenced in society, poverty is an issue that defies all barriers of race, gender, and religion, and ultimately extends itself to children in our schools.

Children in poverty are continually faced with challenges that their well-off peers may never see. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development “more than half of all poor children deal with evictions, utility disconnections, overcrowding, or lack of a stove or refrigerator, compared with only 13 percent of well-off children” (Jensen, 2009). Underprivileged children may face poor nutrition, poor health, lack of parental supervision, inadequate living conditions, adverse social and physical environment, volatile family dynamics, harsh treatment, emotional dysfunction and limited access to transportation. Such conditions have negative effects on development, socialization, behavior and classroom learning. “Because children are required to attend school, education-oriented professionals can make a lifelong difference in the lives of poor children” (Arnett-Hartwick, 2016). Education and positive role models from the middle class have been identified as key ways to eradicate poverty for students. In order to help students get out of poverty it is key that educators display patience, understanding, use modifications, become a mentor to the student, believe in them, and teach them skills connected to both their culture and middle class ideals.

Since the founding of our nation children living in poverty have been disadvantaged in terms of education. In the 1700’s only the very wealthy could afford any formal education. As access to education

increased schools in poorer districts received far fewer resources than those in affluent communities.

Unfortunately, this theme has persisted to present day, where the socioeconomic status of the surrounding community greatly affects the quality of schools. (Boschma, 2016)

In 1965 Lyndon B. Johnson launched the 'War on Poverty' with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, aimed at closing the achievement gap between low-income students and their peers.

Although poverty rates have fallen since 1960 the actual number of people living in poverty has increased to over 45 million (Arnett-Hartwick, 2016). Lyndon B. Johnson's work to fund elementary and secondary schools marked the beginning of federal involvement in schools. The ESEA set national achievement standards and used standardized tests to hold schools accountable and allocate funding. Unfortunately, the law failed to account for the fact that schools in poor communities would take longer to catch up and measured specific standards rather than growth over time (U.S. Department of Education).

Ronald Reagan signed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 1987 to combat homelessness and provide homeless students with equal access to quality education and a chance to succeed. This act defined homelessness for the first time and provided resources to students, educational and extracurricular, to ensure they could meet the same high academic standards as their peers. (Mohan, 2014)

Poverty affects the behaviors and academic performance of students in the educational system. For students in poverty, education is often seen negatively. It's importance is not clear, as it takes time away from acquiring resources for one's family (Beegle, 2007). Schools are also seen negatively as they punish students for living in poverty. If students do not complete certain requirements, they are often punished by the educational system for circumstances that are out of their control. In addition, since schools operate in middle class language, they pose an instant barrier in learning (Beegle, 2007). If an educator has knowledge of both oral culture, which is found in poverty, and print culture, found in middle class language, they can better relate the school material and render a child successful.

In terms of receiving an education, poverty conditions create just as many barriers for students as schools do. Some students could be homeless, living in cars, or hotels. In addition, some students could be living with chronic stressors that harm their functioning in schools and lead to emotional and social problems. Poverty contributes to a lack of emotional regulation, cognitive lags, greater absences, and reduced motivation (Jensen, 2009). Students can also become disconnected from school due to monetary issues that disallow them to participate in sports, after school activities, field trips, or other social events.

To help combat this in the classroom teachers should avoid criticizing students for impulsive behavior, allow time for homework, incorporate physical activities that blow off steam, teach stress management techniques, thank them for coming to class, repeat information, incorporate cooperative partner work, and show students how education can help them move out of poverty (Beegle, 2007). These supports, coupled with true care for one's students in poverty, can make the world of a difference in terms of both academic success, and socialization.

Students who experience poverty respond best to learning that is relevant to their lives and experiential in nature. These practices are best reflected in the ideals of pragmatism and existentialism. Pragmatism emphasizes the importance of context, investigation, and learner centered curriculum. Existentialists believe that everyone can determine their own future and that students should understand and know themselves. These two schools of thought embrace a more fluid body of knowledge and believe in the learning process more than the retention of facts and information. Idealism and Realism on the other hand believe in a set body of knowledge that all students should learn. This mindset means that students are often learning content that is completely removed from their life experiences, something that is especially ineffective for those experiencing poverty. Idealism and realism also put emphasis on memorization and testing. Although the four philosophies accept all students, those experiencing poverty would likely respond best to the teaching practices of pragmatism and existentialism (Johnson, 2014). We

identify most with pragmatism. Under this school of thought teachers respond flexibly to individual students which has been shown to increase the academic success of students living in poverty.

As educators we experience firsthand, the overwhelming effects poverty has on these students and the community. Students coming from this type of background often need help with their health, vocabulary, effort levels, mindsets and even cognition (Jensen, 2009). As educators, we need to be willing to help all students develop these skills. It will be tough and emotional seeing the pain some students endure on a daily basis. However, these students will appreciate what you are doing and the reward of helping them is everything. Some ways we can help is by building relationships and being there for them when they reach out to you. We should also be aware of local resources where children or families in need can get help. This might be very emotional experience and difficult to talk with students about, but being open, knowledgeable, and helpful is what these students are seeking. As educators, we need to be willing to help create a better level of living even if it's only little, these students will be thankful. The little gestures can help in big ways.

Our beliefs about education are centered around doing the best we can for all of our students. No matter what the challenge, we do not want to give up. This falls in line especially with students in poverty. We want to help them learn and be successful in any way we can. Some ways to help students in these situations are to offer them places to go such as community centers, keep supplies in the classroom, offer them snacks in the class if they are hungry, and even have some extra clothes they can borrow. We also believe that creating a safe classroom environment and building strong relationships is needed to help students in poverty to be successful. Students living in poverty need such mentorship, resources, and care in order to strengthen their socialization skills and build positive relationships with people around them.

Works Cited and Annotations

Arnett-Hartwick, S. s., & Walters, C. M. (2016). Advancing Learning by Countering the Effects of Poverty. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 108(4), 18-22.

This article asserts that there are two things that must happen in order to break the cycle of generational poverty, receiving an education, and having caring adults who intervene and encourage. Research has shown that teachers are the primary reason for student success despite many other factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and race. Because all children are required to attend school teachers can help to combat poverty by teaching life skills, providing support, and engaging students in their education.

This article cites research that shows the strong relationship between student engagement and achievement. It also provides advice for how to best engage students, specifically those in high-poverty environments, and how professional attitudes need to adjust to best meet these student's needs.

Beegle, Donna. "Educating Students Who Live in Poverty." *Communication Across Barriers*. U.S Department of Education. Web.
<<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/2012thematicmtg/studentpovty.pdf>>.

This is a resource put together for educators, that highlights how to teach students who are living in poverty. It discusses the stereotypes associated with poverty, has strategies to break the barriers set up by poverty, and also explains what poverty looks like in the United States.

Although short, this piece also presents many facts on the lives of students who live in poverty, and forces readers to question their personal bias on poverty. A few points made by this article to help students out of poverty is to make failure not an option for them, be a mentor, and work on building strong relationships with both students and families in poverty.

Beegle, D. (n.d.). Breaking the Iron Cage: Helping People in Poverty Move Forward. Retrieved March 4, 2017, from <http://combarriers.com/sites/default/files/promo/Gen%20Iron%20Cage.pdf>

This talks about the poverty realities in America. Looking at all the numbers for numbers, housing, etc. They then discuss the different types of poverty and the meaning of what poverty is. Then after defining everything and understanding it, then discusses the strategies to break poverty and how to build relationships.

Beegle, Donna Marie., Debbie Ellis, and Rima Akkary. *See Poverty-- Be the Difference!* Tigard, Or. Communication Across Barriers, 2007. Print.

See Poverty, Be the Difference! is a book that highlights the stigma, stereotypes, causes, and barriers to those in generational poverty, and how to help people move out of poverty. In terms of education, this text points out why impoverished students are shut out from schools. Schools are seen negatively to those living in poverty for many reasons. The first is that it's importance is not clear, as it takes time away from earning money, or acquiring resources, as these families are living in constant crisis. Since education doesn't fix a family's immediate need or crisis, it is pushed aside. Schools are also seen negatively as they punish students for living in poverty. If students do not complete this homework, they are often punished by being forced to stay in for recess or detention. However, some students may not have the home, resources, electricity, or help to complete this work. Punishments like those above push students' desire for education further away. Students from poverty also do not understand middle class language. Schools run in middle class language, and therefore pose an instant barrier in learning. If an educator has knowledge of both languages and can relate the school material, the child is more likely to be successful. Schools can also be negative experiences for students in poverty due to peer interactions. Students may not dress or act the same way due to class differences, thus making it

an unwelcoming place. Although there are numerous barriers mentioned above, this book highlights how educators, with a focus of strong relationships, understanding, a listening ear, and a belief in the child can make a difference and push them out of poverty.

Boschma, J., & Brownstein, R. (2016). The Concentration of Poverty in American Schools. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/02/concentration-poverty-american-schools/471414/>

This article explores the effects that economic and racial isolation have on education, especially in urban city centers. Research points to the fact that about 75% of minority students attend school with majority low income students. The effects of poverty become more extreme as the concentration of poverty increases. Thus the best predictor of the racial achievement gap is the degree to which low income minority students attend school with other low income students. Poverty rates within schools also turn out to be good predictors of overall school quality. Residential integration as well as school integration are crucial in combating the effects of economic and racial segregation.

This article uses educational research to assess the effects of concentrated poverty in America's cities. It also discusses potential solutions to the issue of concentrated poverty such as controlled-choice being implemented in some cities.

Budge, Kathleen and Parrett, William. "What Can Schools Do to Address Poverty?" *Edutopia*. N.p., 10 Dec. 2015. Web. 27 Feb. 2017.

<<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/what-can-schools-do-to-address-poverty-william-parrett-kathleen-budge>>.

This Edutopia article highlights ways schools can address and work with students in poverty. Some of the suggestions that this article makes are to limit the use of technology and required work, make involvement in activities affordable, keep extra school supplies and food on hand, and develop relevant curriculum to students in poverty. Another big factor this article stressed was to advocate for students in poverty, and encourage them to be tested for Gifted and Talented services, college level programs, or other academic opportunities. Often times parents are unaware of these programs, and how to advocate for their student growth. Therefore, as an educator it is important to help open up opportunities for students in poverty. Lastly, this article also touched on parent-teacher communication. Although some parents may not respond, it is important to continue reaching out in a variety of ways to help established a trusting relationship with the parent and school system.

Budge, W. P. (2015, December 03). How Do We Talk About Poverty in Schools? Retrieved March 04, 2017, from <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/educators-need-understand-about-poverty-william-parrett-kathleen-budge>

This article talks about how we should talk about poverty in schools. They use labels in schools to talk about poverty, such as: Low Income, Free or Reduced Lunch, Title 1 Eligible, Economically Disadvantaged and Low Socioeconomic Status. It describes each in detail of what they are. It went in to talk about how some labels really hurt some students that are living in poverty and we

need to be “sensitive to the effects of poverty on our student’s state of mind and ensure that we separate their developing sense of self for their living conditions.

Coley, R. J. (2013, July). Poverty and Education: Finding the Way Forward. Retrieved March 4, 2017, from https://www.ets.org/s/research/pdf/poverty_and_education_report.pdf

This article really touches upon everything you need to know about poverty. We look into the all the numbers of poverty, including, how we compare to different countries around the world.

Looks at families and parenting behaviors and all the necessities needed in order to survive and how most families can’t reach those levels. Then lastly it will look at the segregation and isolation of these students in schools.

Gordon, M., & Cui, M. (2014). School-Related Parental Involvement and Adolescent Academic Achievement: The Role of Community Poverty. *Family Relations*, 63(5), 616-626.

While there are many studies that show the positive effects of school-related parental involvement on academic performance, none of these studies examine how communities affect that association. This study examined how community poverty influences the positive impact of parental involvement, finding that the association between parental involvement and academic success is much weaker in poor communities.

This research is very interesting because it suggests just how influential poverty is on academic achievement. This article helps to outline the effects that community poverty has on schools, students, and parents.

Jensen, Eric. "Chapter 2. How Poverty Affects Behavior and Academic Performance." *How Poverty Affects Behavior and Academic Performance*. ASCD. Web. 27 Feb. 2017.
<<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109074/chapters/How-Poverty-Affects-Behavior-and-Academic-Performance.aspx>>.

Written by Eric Jensen, this article highlights the effects poverty has on student behavior and academic performance. This article looks at the realms of emotional and social challenges associated with poverty, the effects poverty has on school behavior and performance, and the role acute and chronic stressors play in the lives of impoverished students. Students in poverty seek out relationships in schools, and the feelings of importance and worth. These outcomes, along with academic outcomes, are hindered by the conditions of poverty. Some tips that this chapter provides for educators are to avoid criticizing students for impulsive behavior, limit homework, provide physical and kinesthetic activities, teach stress reduction techniques, and teach unlearned emotions and behaviors to students. With strong awareness and care, educators can reach their students in poverty and help make school a welcoming place.

Mohan, E., & Shields, C. M. (2014). The Voices Behind the Numbers: Understanding the Experiences of Homeless Students. *Critical Questions In Education*, 5(3), 189-202.

Each year 1.6 million students experience some form of homelessness which has a negative effect on academic outcomes. While this article provides research based information and outlines legislation regarding homelessness the main purpose is to provide insight into the day to day experiences of homeless students in schools. The data collected by the authors of this article is presented in the form of narrative portraits of five homeless students who were interviewed along with family members. These interviews reveal how diverse homelessness is and attempts to break down the stereotypes surrounding homelessness.

This is an excellent article that helps you understand what life is like for some homeless youth and the many scenarios that lead families to homelessness. It also helps to outline the laws that protect homeless students in schools.

The Daily Bad News Gazette [Digital image]. (2011, September). Retrieved March 4, 2017, from <http://visual.ly/poverty-education>

This is an infographic that shows some jaw dropping numbers and statistics about what is going on in the world around us. Looking at poverty and the effects with schools.

“What is poverty? | Where is the poverty line? | Who is poor?” *Poverty USA*. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Web. <<http://www.povertyusa.org/>>

This website offers many resources to help us understand the effects of poverty. It offers a poverty quiz to see how much we know about poverty which we will be using in our presentation, a poverty map which compares states poverty levels to others and the counties inside the states. This is a wonderful resource to get a good understanding on what the levels of poverty are around the U.S.

Additional Sources

U.S Department of Health and Human Services. "2015 Poverty Guidelines." *ASPE*. 23 Nov. 2015. Web. 06 Mar. 2017. <<https://aspe.hhs.gov/2015-poverty-guidelines>>.

U.S. Department of Education. “Every Student Succeeds Act.” <https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=ft>

Johnson, J. A., & Musial, D., & Hall, G. E., & Gollnick, D. M. (2014) *Foundations of American Education*. Pearson Publication